

CHALLENGING TRADITION: CHANGING BASIC ACADEMY PROGRAMS TO  
ATTRACT AND RETAIN THE FUTURE TRAINEE.

Article

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This Command College project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future, but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future, creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

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Trainee Cambio drives up to the academy building ready to begin her academy experience. She is glad that she was able to complete most of the required courses before she entered this part of the program. Having the instruction with the built-in critical thinking and ethical decision-making components accessible online and on CD-ROM really helped her understand her role and responsibilities as a law enforcement professional much better. She sees the academy staff officers standing outside. She thinks they look like they belong on a recruitment poster.

It's Day One, Week One. The staff officers welcome Cambio and the other 50 trainees and direct them to a classroom. On each of the desks is a network Personal Data Assistant (PDA) with satellite modem capabilities. Each trainee receives a PDA for the duration of the academy. The PDAs are loaded with the necessary information for the academy. They are for interactive learning between the trainees, instructors and staff officers. Private vendors, in partnership with the state have arranged the use and implementation of this system.

At the front of the classroom stands Staff Officer Murdog. He explains several items of protocol that the trainee will need to know. He asks if there are any questions. Several trainees request clarification, which they receive. Murdog explains to the trainees that the academy is designed to be collaborative venture between the students, the instructors, both sworn officers and those from the private sector.

The beginning of an academy class is the staff officers' favorite time. They have prepared the building for the new trainees – it has a new coat of paint, and the floors are spotless. The staff officers are glad the program is no longer six months long. Three

months is ample time to condition them physically and get them oriented into the basics of law enforcement. The online information has been very helpful in this area. They will learn the specific area duties once assigned to their stations. There are also many interactive programs on the market. Many of these will enhance the critical thinking skills and ethical decision-making requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century law enforcement trainee. It has helped the trainee to become flexible within the new law enforcement culture.

January 10, 2006

It's Day Two, Week One and the staff officers scan their computer screens assessing the downloaded reports from the cadets. They gave the entire class a writing assignment for homework and the computer has evaluated the work and identified those that need correction and a tutorial for the trainee. Murdog is thankful that the academy has transitioned to the use of technology to help everyone do his or her jobs. It's fortunate that the statewide funding through private business partnerships is available and being used to enhance all areas of the program.

Trainee Cambio knocks on the door of the staff office before entering. She stands in front of the line of desks where the staff officers sit and asks for some assistance. Officer Murdog asks what she wants.

She explains, "I'm having difficulty maintaining the satellite linkup for the next instructor." Cambio explains that the next instructor is being beamed to the classroom via satellite in the form of a holograph. The instructor is a businessperson from Chicago who is the nationwide expert in traffic instruction.

Murdog returns to the classroom with Cambio to troubleshoot the problem and gets the link to connect. “Next time, make sure this switch is up.” The holograph jumps to life and the live interaction between student and instructor begins, “Good Morning, Class! I have reviewed the work you’ve downloaded and would like to discuss some of your decisions.”

Murdog smiles at the class and wishes his academy experience could have been this progressive and relevant to the real world.

### **Challenging Tradition**

What you just read is a glimpse of what a future academy trainee may experience. This scenario challenges traditional thinking concerning the structure of academy training. During the last decade, law enforcement, as a whole, has evolved from being isolationists to embracing partnerships with the communities to fight crime. The trainee has changed from a military veteran to a computer-literate individual whose idea of making a difference in the community is different from that of many police veterans.

The changes suggested in this article require placing the onus of learning on the trainee by allowing access to the information using PDA, CD-ROM, and virtual reality computer technology allowing outside subject-matter experts to team-teach with active law enforcement personnel. There would be an increase in the use of practical scenarios. The trainee must apply the basic law enforcement information, use the Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS) components (if applicable), and explain their actions using ethical problem-solving principles.

Also proposed are limits on the amount of time that a trainee must attend a basic academy program. Many of the current academy programs far exceed the minimum requirement of 664 hours. The Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), which governs law enforcement hiring and training within the State of California, has required basic academy graduates complete a standardized Field Training Officer (FTO) program upon entering patrol.<sup>1</sup> This requirement allows agencies to teach agency-specific protocol during the FTO program, leaving the basic courses academy to teach the basics of law enforcement, legislative mandates, and those perishable skills that training centers are best- equipped to teach.

The areas of change focused on in this article are identifying the expectations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century trainee, incorporating the COPPS philosophy and ethical problem solving in each phase of the program. The use of computers, both for academic tasks and in areas of decision-making, can develop the trainee to their fullest potential. Developing partnerships with outside, non- law enforcement instructors, to team-teach with active law enforcement members can enhance problem solving and broaden the acceptability of other's opinions.

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> century trainee**

The trainee of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is much different from those of the past. Taking into consideration society's manner of labeling generations, the traditional applicant pool falls into two categories: Generation X, those born between 1961-1980 and The Nexters, those born between 1980-2000.<sup>2</sup> The Generation X trainee is shaped by a survivor mentality, which is often construed as being doubtful and cynical. They have seen or experienced downsizing of large organizations and understand that there is no

guarantee of survival in organizational change. They are motivated by the need to have flexibility, use technology, are comfortable with multitasking, and require constructive feedback in order to do their jobs more effectively.<sup>3</sup> Often the most important component of these characteristics is the need for constructive feedback. Gen Xers want to have the ability to dialog and problem solve wherever they are held accountable. We must become comfortable with a subordinate asking why.

The Nexters have a great level of comfort with digital technology, as most grew up with some form of video game or computer to occupy their time, since both parents worked. They want to have a clear picture of the work environment and their part in the future. “Countless hours of research by experts on generations and interviews with today’s kids show that the largest generation in American history (78 million Americans are currently under the age of 20) is surprisingly optimistic, driven, socially committed, and considerably more moral than any other generation in recent history.”<sup>4</sup> Bob Filipczak, co-author of Generations At Work adds that the Nexters will “want to move en masse” and “is very group-oriented.”<sup>5</sup> According to Caryn Meyer in her article “Talkin’ ‘bout my Generation,” technology is as basic as reading, writing and arithmetic, for the Nexters. They have grown up with the Internet. Research shows that the Nexters are using the Internet for more than just fun and games – to them, it’s a tool for doing business.<sup>6</sup>

### **Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving**

Bureaucratic organizations, including law enforcement, are slowly changing to address the diverse needs and expectations of our communities. Gone are the days of citizens wanting officers priorities to be waging war against guns, gangs and drugs.

Citizens now desire officers to have integrity, to be willing to create partnerships and a customer-service philosophy.<sup>7</sup> A greater number of law enforcement agencies have embraced the Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS) philosophy of providing service. The COPPS philosophy promotes the community-oriented, problem-solving approach to policing as a better way to create safer communities. Through effective police/community partnerships and problem-solving strategies that combine enforcement and prevention, local agencies can proactively respond to the causes of crime, fear and other social problems.<sup>8</sup> The COPPS philosophy is one our communities openly advocate, embrace and many times demand. However, COPPS is not a required component of problem solving for each phase of the basic academy. The information is taught but is not tested with a written test, nor is it required in practical scenario application.

Many of the 21<sup>st</sup> century trainees can fail to thrive in a system where their opinion is not valued or expression is not permitted. Although law enforcement continues to have the need to develop a hierarchy in order to address combat-like incidents, more often than not, it is not necessary in day-to-day operations. The COPPS philosophy allows empowerment of the officer to resolve problems using as many allied agency resources as needed.

### **Values/ Ethics**

Trainees must continually be encouraged to rely upon ethical problem-solving principles during every phase of the academy. Ethics is a significant element of law enforcement training and operations as a whole. There is value in including critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills during each phase of the program.



Group discussions, facilitated by the instructor, using scenarios to reinforce ethical decision-making and critical thinking skills are essential. Each trainee should be placed into real-life scenarios to work through under controlled conditions. The instructor and peers should challenge each trainee to make the most prudent and ethical decisions that benefit the community as a whole. Each decision is evaluated and the trainee held accountable, thus learning from each success, as well as each mistake.

### **Information and Technology**

Computer technology and multimedia software has increased in availability and educational learning potential. Many of the trainees of today and the future are comfortable learning from programs on CD-ROM and Personal Data Assistants (PDA). The competition between PDA vendors and increased software applications make this a viable alternative to desktop computers for use by academy trainees. The medical community has been using PDA-based software to teach medical students different segments of medical school for several years.<sup>9</sup>

Use of virtual reality-based training can be used to expose trainees to real-life use-of-force simulations and evaluate their ability to function effectively in a crisis.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Use of Outsiders**

Law enforcement academy programs can become learning organizations by bringing outside professionals or subject matter experts into the fold. Many professionals within the private sector are willing to collaborate with law enforcement to improve service and create larger networking opportunities. These instructors, from the private sector, have a customer-service perspective and operate with that as a valued goal.

Basic academy course presenters tend to use only officers, or former officers to teach courses. There are courses that may be taught by an outside instructor. We must teach the trainees to value the opinion and expertise of others not in law enforcement. The COPPS philosophy advocates the use of other agencies and bringing all involved in a problem to the problem-solving table together, thus making this a component of a minding organization. Moshe Rubenstein, co-author of The Minding Organization, defines a minding organization as one that is willing to bring the future to the present and include all involved in the change to the planning table early. “The leadership of the minding organization must focus on the purpose of creating material value, but it must be always mindful of the need to cultivate social and spiritual values in the organization.”<sup>11</sup> Modeling of this technique at the academy will increase the trainee’s ability to value the opinions of others when they graduate. Using law enforcement and outside instructors in the academy setting encourages trainees to think beyond their comfort zones.

### **A Snapshot of Basic Academy History**

POST has gone through a variety of different changes over the last 40 years; creating hiring standards and mandated academy training programs. The required academy programs have evolved from a mandate of 200 hours in 1964 to 664 hours today.<sup>12</sup> However, many academy presenters exceed this minimum requirement of 664 hours, offering programs in excess of 950 hours.

### **Performance-Based Instructional System**

The conversion to a performance-based instructional system was complete by July 1, 1980.<sup>13</sup> “Course requirements specified in terms of approximately 600

performance objectives organized into 12 functional areas. To complete the Regular Basic Course, students had to demonstrate mastery of a certain percentage of performance objectives in each functional area.”<sup>14</sup>

POST has identified the need to provide academy presenters the most current resources possible and to increase the learning ability of the student. In 1998, POST began offering a workbook system of instruction for the Learning Domains. This workbook system gave the instructor clear parameters for instruction and gave the student the ability to learn using a standardized format. All academies are encouraged to use adult learning principles to increase the potential of success.

### **Rite-of-passage**

Many veteran officers have long considered the Regular Basic Academy a rite-of-passage. There is a certain amount of pride associated with completing the academy, as it is a long-term commitment and, more times than not, very difficult both physically and emotionally.

Many academies were modeled after the military boot camp, as many of the candidates were former military personnel. They were career-minded and willing to do whatever the academy program required with little complaint.

Law enforcement must adapt to the trainee of today and tomorrow, not by lowering the standards for hiring or the requirements of the academy, but by taking a new look at the students and adapting to their needs and expectations. An essential component is the need to maintain a high standard of excellence. Outline the expectations for every step of the program, and hold each trainee accountable to those

expectations. Academies should be teaching what we want our officers and deputies to learn: ethical service within the partnerships we have in the communities we work.

## **Blending Generations**

As important as it is to recognize the characteristics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century trainee, it is equally important to identify the fact that the instructors and staff members who are responsible for the academy program are often a different generation than those being trained. Conflicts occur when the expectations of one are not the same as the other. Many organizations are having difficulty adapting to the changes in the composition of the workplace. Law enforcement is no different. We must clearly define what is expected of staff and instructors if a successful transition is expected.

Basic academy programs have long survived on the premise that the trainee will do what is asked of them, without complaint or questioning. This is not so for the trainee of the future. The Gen X trainee is often more cynical and doubtful, while the Nexters are more cooperative and optimistic about their part in the future. How academy programs change may affect how successful agencies are in recruiting and retaining the 21<sup>st</sup> century trainee. We in law enforcement are not just competing against ourselves for this workforce; we are also competing with private industry as well.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century trainee is extremely capable of taking on the dynamic challenges that society presents to law enforcement today; in fact, they may do it better than the veterans may. The new trainee is unwilling to sit and be ignored. They will demand to have a voice that is reckoned with, and will challenge the status quo. Unwilling to stand in the wings, they want to stand in the gap of where our organizations are, and where we need to go in order to add value to our communities.

## **Conclusion**

The scenario outlined at the beginning of this article proposed the option for the academy trainee to complete core academic components of the academy before entering the program. POST has developed a written workbook system that is available to the public, which incorporates the required objectives for each subject. The workbooks are digitized and updated when needed to comply with legislative changes and changes in case law. It is feasible for this information to be digitized into CD-ROM or PDA format and made a prerequisite area of responsibility for all students. Each subject should have scenarios built into the instruction, so trainees can see practical application of the information. All trainees will be tested at the academy during the beginning of the program. Setting high standards with clearly outlined expectations is the challenge the new trainee thrives on and may even demands.

The current academy training centers should continue to provide the basic instruction in use of force. The basic skills related to the use of firearms, weaponless defense, and defensive and tactical driving are best taught by training center personnel who have the equipment needed for these areas of instruction. Many regional training centers have been equipped with driving simulators and force option machines that enhance the decision-making abilities of trainees under controlled circumstances.

POST has required all academy graduates complete a standardized Field Training Officer (FTO) program upon entering patrol. The FTO program has many of the same requirements currently taught in the basic academy. This article suggests that those tasks should be taught by the agency once the trainee is hired and not during the academy program. This change may increase the success of graduates, who do not

have to learn an agency specific method or protocol that may differ from what was taught in the academy. Eliminating redundancy and confusion reduces training time and should be more cost effective.

POST should continue to anticipate the future by analyzing the trends and changes that society demonstrates and how best to serve their customers. Instead of complicating the training requirement, simplify it. Basic academies should continue to require the ethical standard of excellence that is necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century law enforcement professional. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the basic academy programs be reviewed every ten years. There should be a plan in place that evaluates trends and events every three years in order to make a course correction, if needed. The suggestions posed are not the sole answer, but are a point from which to start.

The future of basic academy programs is a positive one. There is great potential to develop the programs in such a manner as to address the expectations of those that law enforcement seeks; and trains them accordingly.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> POST Bulletin 98-01 <http://www.post.ca.gov/BULLETIN/Bul9801.htm>
- <sup>2</sup> Ron Zemke, Claire Raines and Bob Filipczak, Generations At Work, (Amacom, 2000) Soundview Executive Book Summaries, p.2.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid. P.5.
- <sup>4</sup> Caryn Meyer, Talkin' 'bout my Generation  
([www.successmtgs.com/Archives/0100/genx](http://www.successmtgs.com/Archives/0100/genx))
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Strategic Planning Process in Ventura County, 1998.
- <sup>8</sup> California Attorney General's Office <http://caag.state.ca.us/cvpc/compol.html>
- <sup>9</sup> Discovery Channel – Technology Update. October 2000
- <sup>10</sup> Paul Anderson, [http://www.infowar.com/mil\\_c4i/mil\\_c4in.html-ssi](http://www.infowar.com/mil_c4i/mil_c4in.html-ssi)
- <sup>11</sup> Moshe Rubenstein and Iris Firstenberg, The Minding Organization, (Wiley, 1999) p. 151
- <sup>12</sup> Commission on POST, POSTScripts, August 1974, and POST Basic Course Administrative Manual, Section III-1, 1995.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.

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